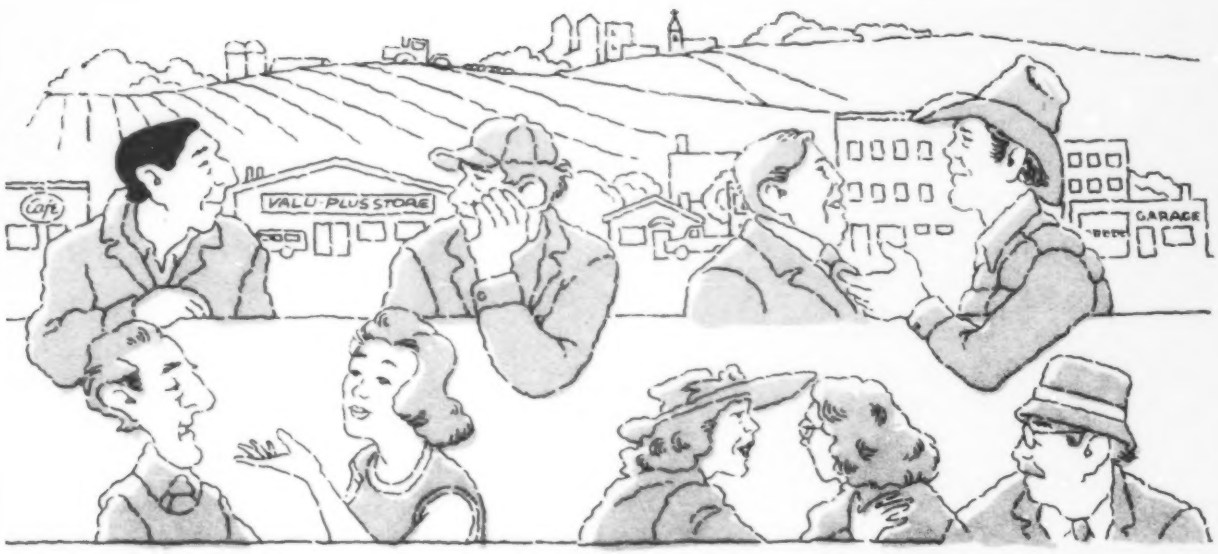
COMMUNITY CHOICES

A Sustainable Communities Program For Manitoba



A guide for the formation and effective use of Community Round Tables.

Manitoba
Rural Development

This publication is also available in French.
Cette publication existe également en français.

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THE COMMUNITY CHOICES PROGRAM

The Community Choices Program helps Manitobans examine their communities and make some hard decisions on how best to manage their resources for the future. It concentrates on helping communities develop the capacity to plan comprehensively, act strategically and to work towards achievable goals.

The program is an active approach to community development. It enables the community to set priorities and allocate resources according to local needs. It takes the community from the stage of wanting to do something to the level of being able to move confidently forward in an organized manner.

Community Choices is a locally driven program. Its success will depend on the participation and commitment of the local people. It will allow communities to take an active role in designing their own future.

Community Choices does not duplicate or replace existing programs or opportunities. Instead it will prepare a blueprint or a vision for the future of the community into which existing programs can fit. This community vision can focus the decisions being made by Councils, School Boards, Chambers of Commerce and many others, toward an agreed upon common future.

The Community Choices Program is based on the principle that in every community there are many decision makers and, as far as possible, all of these decision makers should be involved in charting a course for their community. This is where the idea of a Community Round Table comes from.

COMMUNITY CHOICES

A Sustainable Communities Program For Manitoba

This booklet is a guide for members of Community Round Tables.

It is designed to provide an overview of the Community Choices program. It is not a stand-alone, how-to booklet for writing a community vision. The round table **will** need guidance and someone to facilitate at least some of this process: perhaps a local person, a hired consultant or staff from the Department of Rural Development.

The success of the Community Choices program in any community depends on local participation, local leadership and local ownership of the process.

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GETTING STARTED

The first thing to remember is that the initiative to become part of the Community Choices Program must come from the local people. It begins with the formation of a round table. Anyone can start the process and there are five steps to follow:

1. Check for community interest
2. Contact Rural Development
3. Define the community
4. Establish the Round Table
5. Organize for action

1. Check for community interest.

Before initiating the process you may wish to gauge the interest in your community by talking with individuals and representatives of a variety of groups and organizations active in the community. Touch base with councils, not only your own but those from the neighbouring towns and municipalities. Discuss it with the chambers of commerce, farm groups, recreation groups and other organizations you think might be interested. If you think it would be productive, hold a joint meeting with these groups.

After talking with these people you should have a good idea of whether or not to pursue the matter further.

2. Contact the Department of Rural Development.

Staff from the local Rural Development offices are available to provide information and assistance anywhere along the way. At this point you may simply require more information or you may want someone to attend a meeting with you and your interest groups to further explain the Community Choices program. Contact the Rural Development office nearest you. These offices are listed in the back of this brochure.

3. Define the community.

The first decision that must be made when embarking on the Community Choices Program is how to define your community. In this case it may not be your community in the traditional sense - one town or village - but a much broader definition. The Community Choices program encourages a multi-municipal approach- one town, and a municipality, two or three municipalities and their included towns and so on. There are social, economic and environmental linkages between towns, villages and surrounding areas. Each affects the other. For this reason this broad community approach is favoured. The grant system connected with the program is structured to encourage this approach.

You must determine the boundaries of your community for the purposes of this program. Rural Development may be consulted for advice and guidance, but the decision is ultimately yours.

4. Establishing the Round Table

Once you have defined your community you are ready to organize a group to manage the Community Choices Program in your community. This committee will be referred to as the Round Table. It is called the Round Table because everyone who comes to this table representing a particular interest or point of view, comes as an equal. No one group - not council, the Chamber of Commerce, or anyone else - carries any special powers or privileges.

The major role of this Round Table will be to develop a long-term strategy for sustainable development in your community.

The Round Table will be comprised of individuals who represent the wide variety of interest groups or stakeholders, in the community. While it is important that the Round Table be a cross-section of the community, care should be taken to ensure that the group does not become so large and unwieldy that its effectiveness is reduced. When inviting stakeholders to the Round Table, keep in mind that in many cases one individual through his or her community involvement may represent several interest groups.

5. Organizing for action.

Before you start developing a vision for the community you will want to get your Round Table organized to develop a sense of what you're going to do, how and when.

Get a basic organization. Appoint a chair-person - even if its only temporary - to keep order, call meetings or assign work. Have a secretary keep minutes so everyone is clear about what you've decided. Decide if you need any other officers.

Develop a rough activity schedule.
What stages do you think you will have to go through to develop and implement a community vision? What might be involved in each stage? How much time should you allot for each stage? At this point this schedule will be very general and it will change.

COMMUNITY CHECKLIST

Go through the following list of organizations that may operate in your community. Check off those who you think should be involved in the Round Table to make it as representative of the community as possible.

Rural Municipalities_____
_____
_____

Local Government Districts _____
_____
_____

Towns/Villages_____
_____
_____

_ Conservation Districts
_ Planning Districts
_ Regional Development Corps.
_ Chambers of Commerce
_ Fish and Wildlife Assoc.
_ Cottage/Beach Associations
_ Retail Associations
_ Fishermen/Loggers/Trappers
_ Major Employers
_ School Division(s)
_ Naturalist Society
_ Agricultural Producers
_ Native Groups
_ Metis Groups
_ Recreation Associations
_ Hospital Board

_ Library Board
_ Heritage Groups
_ Women's Organizations
_ Social Agencies
_ Service Clubs/Organizations
_ Environmental Groups
_ Business Associations
_ Soil & Water Management Gps
_ Realtors Associations
_ Seniors Groups
_ Youth Groups
_ Farm Associations
_ Other:
_
_
_

This list is not necessarily complete, but it provides a springboard. Nor does it suggest that everyone on the list should be on the Round Table. It is up to you to decide.

Also remember that in every community there are people who may not be associated with any particular group now but who may, because of their experience or special skills, make a significant contribution to the Round Table. Look for the community leaders.

When will the public be involved?
Make some decisions now about when and how you want to go to the public. Going to the public or to specific community groups can be a valuable way to :

- identify important issues;
- solicit views on community trends;
- solicit views on an ideal or preferred future; and
- evaluate the Round Table's views on a preferred future

You need to prepare for this participation in order to make it most effective.

Apply for a grant.
Assign someone to fill out a grant application. You'll need the necessary endorsement of Councils. You can call Rural Development for any necessary information and then submit the application.

Round Table Team Building Seminar

Part of getting organized may involve developing a sense of team work among your Round Table members. Rural Development has prepared a one-and-one-half-day Round Table Team Building Seminar. It recognizes that it is difficult for people with such a wide range of interest to come together as an effective decision making body, even if they are all from the same community. The Round Table can, with the help of Rural Development, hire a trained instructor to deliver this seminar. It can help to:

- define the role of the Round Table
- clarify its relationship to other community groups
- deal with:
  - basic group dynamics
  - effective meetings
  - leadership skills
- focus the planning process - making plans that work.
- understand the visioning process
- develop a Round Table plan of action

DEVELOPING THE COMMUNITY VISION

There are three basic stages in developing a realistic vision for the community:

1. Assessing the community.
2. Writing the vision statement
3. Getting a community consensus

1.Assesing the community

A. Information gathering

What are the issues?

What are the concerns, hopes, fears, dreams, problems and the issues in your community. There can be many sources:

• the Round Table members - they should be as representative of the entire community as possible.

• the public - this may be a good time, before you have made any decisions, for a public meeting, where individuals are invited to give their opinions.

• community groups - even though they may be represented on the Round Table, you may feel that new or more detailed perspectives can be gained by meeting with the group.

• individuals - every community has its leaders, its "elders" and its wise men and women.

• outsiders - perhaps there are people from outside your community (neighbours, Provincial politicians, civil servants) who have information and perspectives that can help you see your community more clearly.

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

One good way to assess the community is to deal with the issues, the facts and the perceptions under four headings:

• What are the **strengths** of this community? What things define and sustain it? What things are so important that if you lost them, the community would be significantly diminished? What are your assets?

• What are the **weaknesses?** What things seem to stand in the way? to hold the community back? to prevent it from being the ideal community? What are your liabilities?

• What **opportunities** are there to be taken advantage of? Is there something about the size, the location, the type of industry, the character of your region that may be a hidden asset?

• What are the **threats?** What local, regional, provincial, national and even international issues suggest a special threat to your community?

What is your community like?

Before you start to analyze where your community is going, you may want a clearer

idea of where it has been and what it is today. This is called a community profile. Rural Development can provide a statistical information package to help focus your discussion.

The Round Table will have to decide how much detail is needed at this stage. Remember, at this point you're only looking for a broad picture of your community:

- the population and how it has changed
- the basis of the economy
- services existing... services lacking
- local resources
- trends

There are many ways to find the information you need:

- surveys
- library research
- meeting with special groups
- talking to individuals

You may not need all of this information and you may be able to put a lot of it together, at the level of detail you feel you need, in an evening. You may also have some local research talent that you can tap: a librarian, a student, anyone with some research skills and enthusiasm for the community.

What other information needs are there?

There is no "information checklist" that you can fill in and be sure you know all you need to know about your community. You have to decide what other information you might need in order to make good decisions.

- Are some issues little more than "gut feelings" that need to be quantified?

- Are some issues too vague and need to be better understood?

- Are there people who should be surveyed or interviewed to get a better understanding?

Also, this may not be the end of your information gathering activities. As your vision of the community develops you may identify a need for other information.

One cautionary note:
Don't get caught up in "research" expecting it will give you all the answers. In the end the Round Table members still have to make the decisions about what it means and what your community is going to do about it. If the Round Table truly represents the community then their "gut feeling" and good judgement are at least as important as all the facts and figures that might be compiled.

B. Assessment and Conclusions

It might help to have one of your members compile the information that has been collected up to this point. You don't need a glossy, "high tech" report; just a record for future reference.

Do you have a realistic picture of your community?

What conclusions can be drawn from this information? You may want to try to make some statements about your community:

"Our community has been...."
"Our community is...."
"Our community seems to be becoming...."
"We have these assets and opportunities..."
"We have these liabilities..."
"We have these hopes..."

Use these statements, or some other summarizing process, to present **a realistic picture of your community.** Make sure that this broad description of the present state of your community has dealt with the issues and concerns identified in the background data and analysis.

Do you need public feedback?

Should the Round Table go to the public at this stage, before beginning to write the vision? Each Round Table has to make that decision.

You know the community. If you think the Round Table would benefit from presenting your conclusions to the public and asking for opinions and recommendations then do it. It may be an ideal opportunity to confirm your conclusions, find ideas that were missed and get the public "on side" before the Round Table comes back with a vision.

There are many effective ways to seek public input:

- publish information in the newspaper and ask for comments;
- hold a public meeting;
- organize informal discussion groups;
- meet with community groups.

Your Round Table will have to judge the best public participation techniques to suit your community.

2. Writing the vision statement

You might have expected this to be the largest section in this handbook. After all, developing a vision is what this process is all about.

But the fact is, there is no standard process. A Round Table might follow some sort of scientific decision making process. Or they might have a free-for-all, no holds barred debate. They may be able to put it together in an evening. Or it may take six months. Every community is different and every Round Table will follow a process that best suits them.

Whatever process is followed in preparing the vision statement it should:

- encourage full participation by all Round Table members;

- focus on a realistic and achievable future based on the Round Table's assessment of the community;

- balance the "dreams" with the basic "nuts and bolts" development ideas;

- always be conscious of the people and the values that characterize the community; and

- always be conscious of the principles of sustainable development and the need for a long range view that considers the environment as well as the economy.

Defining a single community vision can be very difficult sometimes leading to prolonged debate over words and meanings. It sometimes leads to confusion and a loss of focus on the goal of producing a vision. The Round Table should use a facilitator to assist them through the development of goals and the creation of an action plan. A facilitator is a neutral person to keep the group on track and to guide it toward the completion of its task.

There is no standard for a vision and every community will be different. But try to ensure that your vision contains these elements:

- a broad description of the present state of your community (this is to set the local context for your vision);

- a broad description of what the Round Table would like the community to be in the future, in perhaps 20 years: and

- a list of objectives in the form of potential community projects and programs that have arisen out of the community assessment.

3.Getting a community consensus

Community input

If this is to be a "community" vision, then the public must have an opportunity to review, understand and endorse it.

-Send copies to all community groups, whether or not they participated in the Round Table process. This will include municipal Council, planning and conservation district boards, hospital boards, school boards, etc.

- Meet with community groups to discuss the vision statement and the objectives.

- Make copies available to the general public to review in libraries, municipal offices, recreation centres and other public places.

- Hold a public forum (or forums). Ensure that the advertising is broad and effective and provides a clear description of the aims of the Round Table and the content of the statement.

When this has been done, reconvene the Round Table to review the public input, redraft and finalize the vision statement. It may be appropriate, if there are significant changes, for the Round Table to return to the public review process to gain a consensus on major changes.

Finalize the Vision

This community vision is not final until the community has agreed to it. This is the agreement that is needed:

- **The Round Table must agree on the vision.** The Round Table must come to an agreement that this is in fact the vision that they have for this community. What constitutes "agreement" is up to that particular Round Table.

- **There should be a broad public consensus in support of the vision.**
What constitutes a "public consensus" will have to be decided by that Round Table.

- **The Councils should endorse the vision.** The Round Table should explain the vision to all the Councils which make up that community and obtain their endorsement of the vision.

IMPLEMENTING THE COMMUNITY VISION

1. Develop an action plan.

At this point your community vision contains broad statements of what the community should be like at some future point and it has a list of projects or programs to help achieve this vision. Now it is time to get down to the business of who is doing what and when.

• **Refine the potential projects and programs list**. Be specific. Identify short and long term projects and priorize them. Describe the aims of each program.

• **Identify resources in the community** (labour and financial) to accomplish these projects or programs. Start by looking at the Round Table membership and expand from there. For example:

- Council
- service groups
- Chamber of Commerce
- special interest groups
- an interested business
- interested individuals
- any organized association, council or committee
- local funds, grants or programs.

• **Identify resources outside the community** (labour and financial) such as:

- government staff
- government programs
- Crown Corporations
- other funds, grants and programs

• **Match the projects/programs to the available resources.** Decide which groups or combination of groups can best accomplish your aims.

• **Develop work plans and realistic time frames** for these projects. These may have to be refined and adjusted by the lead group however this will help to give them a better understanding of your expectations.

2. Get a commitment to action

Meet with the groups, agencies or individuals you have matched to projects in order to:

- introduce the Round Table idea;
- explain the community vision;
- describe your action plan and the role they can play;
- solicit their commitment to undertake their project or program; and
- establish some liaison procedure.

3. Promote your vision

Make copies and send them to:

- community groups that participated in the Round Table
- other community groups
- the Councils
- the library and other public places
- Provincial Departments and Agencies
- Federal Departments and Agencies
- any group or individual that should be aware that your community knows where it's going

With some groups or individuals a copy of the vision will not be enough. Round Table members will have to go and explain the vision, to be sure they understand what it means to the community and what their role might be.

The Long Term Role of the Round Table

What happens to the Round Table after the vision has been clearly stated and groups are committed to undertaking their projects and programs? In some communities this may be the end of the Round Table's role. But there could be an important long term role for the Round Table in the community and in the Province. In the community the Round Table can continue to serve as a focus for discussion about the community's future. No plan or vision adopted today will necessarily be realistic tomorrow. Communities change, situations change and all plans need to be revised. The Round Table can act to keep the vision current and find new ways to make it work. It can be an effective sounding board for all local initiatives by any community group.

In addition, Round Tables can send clear messages to the Province about local needs and community priorities. It can urge the Province to re-evaluate programs and it can help the Province to focus more specifically on the needs of rural Manitoba.

With local leadership this long term role is possible.

The Role of the Department of Rural Development

Rural Development offers support to community Round Tables in a number of ways:

• **Matching Grants** to assist the vision process, based on municipal population:
- less than 500 - $1000
- 500 to 1500 - $1500
- over 1500 - $2000

plus $500 non-matching per municipality when more than one municipality joins a RoundTable.

• **Team Building Seminar** - a 1 1/2 day seminar has been prepared by Rural Development to help the Round Table build a more effective team. The Round Table can hire a facilitator to deliver this seminar.

• **Facilitators** - leadership must come from the community. However Rural Development staff can support the process and act as facilitators when needed.

• **Liaison With Government** - at the implementation stage of the community visions process Rural Development staff can provide important links with other Provincial agencies.

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